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A Comparative Analysis of Turkish and Chilean Students' Motivations to Participate in a State-Scholarship Programme

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Abstract:

In this study, the state scholarships of Turkey and Chile were examined as case studies because of the differences in return obligation procedures that influence the participation. While the Chilean scholarship programme (it is called Becas Chile) obliges its recipients to return to Chile in 4 years after graduation, the Turkish programme appoints its recipients at pre-selected positions following the graduation to work for twofold of study duration.

8 doctoral scholarship holders studying in the UK (4 for each group) were interviewed to understand how the specific structure of a scholarship programme influenced their motivations to participate. After the data transcription, thematic analysis was applied and the emerged themes as follows; quality overseas education, intercultural experience and (English) language acquisition, career progression. Despite the similarities in the first three themes, in terms of career, the students' motivations differ due to the differences in return obligations.

Paper: International student mobility (ISM) enriches the lives of ambitious and talented young people across the globe (Knight, 2004). However, Ergin (2019) argues that cross-border mobility prioritizes healthy, brainy, and wealthy students. Without state support, the cross-border mobility of students remains limited for different segments of society (McMahon, 2009) and merely supports an elite club (Ergin, 2019). International scholarships may pave the way for cross-border mobility for talented individuals from lower socioeconomic families lacking the financial resources required for overseas education.

Most international graduates are inclined to stay in the study destinations or aspire to an international career across the world (Findlay et al., 2016). On the other hand, countries that aim to build their human capital with the help of citizens holding a degree from a foreign institution fund their citizens to study abroad, mostly on the condition that they return home upon completing their studies (Perna et al., 2014). As a result, post-study opportunities in the study destinations mostly do

not apply to scholarship holders, who are obliged to return to their home countries. Countries follow different strategies to insert the returnees into the local labour market. For example, Turkey appoints returnees to designated positions, while Chile obliges students to return home and stay for a certain period without automatically offering them a job.

Based on the discussion above, this study investigates international students' motivations to participate in state scholarship programs. Research on scholarship programs concentrates on traditional scholarships such as Fulbright or Erasmus and overlooks state scholarships funded by countries in the transition stage (moving from an efficiency-based economy to a technology-driven economy) (Perna et al., 2014). Therefore, in this study, the state scholarship programs of Turkey and Chile, two upper-middle-income countries in the transition stage, are chosen as case studies.

In the study, a qualitative approach is used to investigate Turkish and Chilean state-sponsored scholarship holders' motivations to participate in the state scholarship programs. Data collection involved in-depth semi-structured interviews with eight (four Turkish and four Chilean) state-sponsored senior PhD students studying in the United Kingdom, representing different scholarship recipient clusters. After transcription of the interviews, I used thematic analysis to elicit a variety of preliminary themes and then added subthemes when needed. I then gathered the related themes and redefined the categories. I followed BERA (2018) ethical guidelines throughout the study.

Findings show that the motivations of Turkish and Chilean state-sponsored students to participate in scholarship programs have similarities as well as differences. Commonly cited reasons to apply for a scholarship program for academic reasons included "quality education at a prestigious university", intercultural experience, "(English) language acquisition", and "career progression" in the home country.

Financial reasons are the main drivers to participate in state scholarship programmes. Even, in some cases, partners encouraged each other to apply for the scholarship individually because one stipend would not be enough to live abroad. Free language courses and cost coverage of international tests such as IELTS and GRE were important motivators for Turkish students.

Due to the differences in return obligations of the scholarship programmes, the beneficiaries held different career prospects even both groups of students are required to return to their home countries. Some Turkish participants cited their reason for applying for the scholarship to guarantee a well-paid job at selected Turkish public universities following graduation. While the Chilean scholarship program does not offer any job guarantee, the Chilean participants expected to get a decent job in Chile in their "preferred field," thanks to their overseas education.

Both scholarship programs are instrumental in advancing human capital and offer talented individuals from disadvantaged groups a quality higher education abroad. However, while both programs oblige their recipients to return home, they have different strategies to insert the returnees into the local labour market. Therefore, the students' motivations for applying for the scholarships vary due to the different conditions of the scholarship programs. Yet, it can be argued that participants were inclined to participate in the scholarship programs mainly to advance their career opportunities in their homelands, where youth unemployment rates are high.

In the future, similar studies should be done with other groups of scholarship recipients. Also, future concerns of beneficiaries caused by different types of return obligations should be investigated.

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